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### Illuminating the Path: Evidence of Initial Success and Implications for the Future

Donna Augustine-Shaw  
*Kansas State University*

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# Illuminating the Path: Evidence of Initial Success and Implications for the Future

Dr. Donna Augustine-Shaw

*Dr. Donna Augustine-Shaw is Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at Kansas State University, and has served as a classroom teacher and a building and district level administrator including superintendent of schools.*

***A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.*** – John C. Maxwell

## Introduction

“Tremendous expectations have been placed on school leaders to cure the ills facing the nation’s schools” (Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, 2007, p. 1). The momentous role of leaders in our schools today to impact these circumstances can be overwhelming. Inherent in complex school and district settings is a required response from new superintendents to shape and express core beliefs that define their leadership. Fundamental to these core beliefs is a demonstrated emphasis on quality instruction and the dedication of resources to espouse student learning. As validated by research, quality leadership significantly impacts student achievement (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2013). According to Waters and Marzano (2006), the positive effects of superintendent longevity on academic achievement can be apparent within the first two years of the superintendent’s term.

As district leaders, school superintendents guide and shape district and school outcomes and serve in multifaceted, political environments. It is one thing to know that strong leadership and supportive, aligned conditions matter and another to coordinate wide scale efforts that actually impact leadership development. The Kansas Educational Leadership Institute (KELI), in a unique response to an identified need by state and local professionals, has provided a vital support to educational leaders in Kansas stepping into the superintendent role for the first time. The mission of KELI has focused on providing this support through strong collaboration and a spirit of partnership with professional leadership organizations across the state. Founding partners included the state department of education; state associations for school boards, school administrators, and superintendents; a civic leadership organization; and a state research university. By capitalizing on shared resources, these partners recognized the benefit of collaboration in serving and meeting the needs of Kansas leaders for the 21st century.

The visible and warranted need for a strong system of leadership support for new superintendents, representative of Kansas regulations and needs, served as an impetus for state-level dialogue. Through purposeful discussion and planning at the local district and state level, KELI was formed to serve as the lead entity, endorsed by the state department of education, and recognized as an area professional learning center to guide and steer this significant work. KELI stepped into the forefront by providing a system of support encompassing mentoring/induction, resource provision and utilization, organizational and professional networking, and reflective learning.

Building high-performing districts depends on the interaction of school leaders within the larger context in which they lead (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2006). Since the grand opening in May 2011, KELI has offered increasing opportunities for supporting growth in leadership. Through purposeful reflection, new superintendents in Kansas are guided by skilled mentors to consider important connections between individual professional growth, their local environment, and guiding leadership standards. The reference to state and national leadership standards has provided an important link for beginning superintendents by helping them understand and apply these standards in their local district context (CCSSO, 2008). Furthermore, KELI programming directed new superintendents to participate in professional meetings and networking and provided an opportunity for deep learning for both new and veteran leaders to increase understanding and application of current issues in the field.

The purpose of this article is to highlight evidence of effectiveness in KELI's first year of operation, determining areas contributing to initial success and applicable changes in moving forward into Year 2. As communication with newly assigned district leaders attending an induction workshop in June 2011 began, new superintendents expressed the need for monthly planning, advice on district-level topics, and encouragement. New superintendents also shared a concern about time for mentoring during the first year. Veteran superintendents attending this workshop indicated a need for relevant and focused professional development designed for leadership in today's schools.

Hence, the program goals outlined in the KELI mentoring and induction program provided connections to promote a more meaningful licensure process in Kansas, a heightened awareness for a clear and featured path of support for new superintendents, and valid professional learning for new and experienced leaders. The services available to first-year superintendents through KELI's innovative and responsive program design provided a positive step in building leadership capacity for Kansas' first-year superintendents.

### **Indicators of Year 1 Success**

The KELI steering committee approved the requirements for the mentoring and induction program in September 2011 and reached consensus on the demonstration of skills and participation in activities important to acquiring the professional district leader endorsement. The list of new superintendents in Kansas school districts formed cohort groups for a given

academic year. KELI staff and partners concurrently identified eligible mentors through an initial application process outlining key qualifications. At the conclusion of the academic year, successful completion of the requirements of the KELI mentoring and induction program was documented. Mentors oversaw mentee program completion requirements and signed agreed-upon forms documenting these stipulations were met. The KELI executive director reviewed and approved these records and submitted verification of completion to the state agency. This process served as the basis for superintendent eligibility to move to a professional district leader license or earn professional development credits under state guidelines. In addition, districts with new superintendents participating in the mentoring/induction program were eligible for state reimbursement upon successful program completion.

KELI evaluated the results of its first year of operation via documented evidence of mentoring/induction activities leading to program completion and eligibility for licensure. Additional components of effectiveness relating to mentoring and induction included coaching training, mentee learning reflections, a perception survey administered to mentees and mentors, and feedback obtained from mentors and mentees on the first year of operation. Mentee involvement in professional organization meetings and networking presented confirmation of attendance and growth in these categories. Professional learning activities for new and veteran leaders provided documented evidence of KELI's impact on leadership development. The five-year plan for leadership support in Kansas established by the KELI governance entities highlighted further evidence of effectiveness in the first year of operation through successful completion of outlined goals related to new superintendent mentoring, training, networking, and deep learning opportunities relevant to Kansas leaders.

### **Mentoring and Induction**

The KELI mentoring and induction program outlined the requirements for new district leaders. A responsive cadre of experienced superintendents who mentored beginning practitioners formed the essential base of support. In 2011-2012, KELI's initial year of operation, nine mentors delivered over 700 hours of individualized contact to 26 first-year Kansas superintendents. Mentors documented these contact hours through written logs to account for completion of this program component. At the conclusion of 2011-2012, 13 district leaders met the requirements for moving from the initial to the professional license, celebrating the accomplishment of a goal vital to KELI's charge. The 13 additional district leaders with full licensure earned credits towards professional license renewal. Twenty-five of 26 mentee districts were eligible for reimbursement from the state department of education for the \$500 participation fee. One mentee with a current professional license opted to participate in mentoring only and did not apply for reimbursement.

Mentoring services delivered by skilled Kansas superintendents in monthly face-to-face sessions provided the foundation of support for mentees. In addition to successful experience as a Kansas superintendent, mentors successfully completed training programs offered by KELI, indicated an

ability to travel to mentor district sites and to communicate through technology, and demonstrated skill in building leadership capacity through mentoring/coaching. Geographic location and experience with similar district demographic variables served as the basis for matching mentees and mentors. Veteran superintendents, with small and large district experience, provided an effective approach to sharing knowledge and skills with new superintendents to aid in their transition and growth. Mentor's written accountability logs provided a brief summary of mentoring/induction activities, including on-site visits and the frequency of interactions between mentor and mentee. The majority of mentoring sessions occurred on-site at the local district. The ability for mentors to visit mentees in their local context provided mentors with insight into actual district happenings, critical relationships, and added convenience for new superintendents. The valued role of mentor and advisor was evidenced by one mentee who shared,

"Having a veteran superintendent to bounce ideas [off] was valuable support. When two or three significant issues arose this year, this was the first call I made to talk through my plans. They were wonderful to ask 'what are you thinking' first, before giving suggestions."

On-going communication between mentees and mentors, driven by the needs of mentees, encouraged a responsive two-way communication approach. An important opportunity for mentee and mentor discussion and an information source to aid in planning included a monthly checklist of major activities and tasks deemed important for first-year superintendents. These checklists provided a foundation for communication and planning at each mentoring visit. These checklists, written by practicing superintendents, served as important benchmarks for essential duties, reports, and deadlines during the calendar year. Disparate differences in superintendent responsibilities existed for many leaders assigned to dual positions in small rural Kansas districts. Therefore, monthly

checklists in Year 2 expanded to include specific items relevant to smaller size districts. Mentors listed the monthly checklists as a practice "that worked" in their end of year reflections. Checklists provided timely topics of discussion at mentoring visits and established a common thread of dialogue in the field among mentors and mentees.

#### Coaching Training.

In addition to the core mentoring/induction framework, experienced Kansas superintendent mentors participated in professional coaching training to enhance onsite mentoring sessions. Certified trainers from a qualified coaching model (Cheliotis & Reilly, 2010) provided initial training in foundational skills and effective coaching practices. Program components included committed listening, paraphrasing, positive intent, and reflective feedback. Specific training topics incorporated new skills in developing a coaching mindset and self-assessing and knowledge of the coaching framework, effective communication strategies, and coaching-mentoring attributes. Mentors established personal target goals and received intentional training on new skill sets. Follow-up coaching training sessions provided customized support for mentors around these identified needs. In the initial year, certified coaching trainers provided 20 hours of accredited training to mentors.

All nine mentors completed a coaching mindset self-assessment in September 2011 and eight mentors completed the self-assessment again in April 2012 (Reiss, 2007). This self-assessment provided mentors an opportunity to reflect on their coaching skills related to 14 attributes conducive to continuous learning and success in the coaching role. Mentors consistently rated themselves high in the areas of trustworthiness and sincerity in both administrations of the self-assessment. Mentors showed growth in the area of knowledge about core coaching competencies and increased their skill in the area of active listening from September to April (see Table 1).

**Table 1 | Mentor Coaching Mindset Self-Assessment**

Attributes	Fall/Spring	Continuum Range			Total
		1-4 Low	5-7	8-10 High	n
Knows core teaching competencies	September April		9 2	6	9 8
Active listener	September April		5 2	4 6	9 8
Trustworthy	September April			9 8	9 8
Sincere	September April			9 8	9 8

Mentors consistently discussed the challenges of knowing when to *mentor* and when to *coach* and identified the need for continued training to help embed these new skills into their practice. Reiss (2007) defined coaching as moving a person to increased levels of ability, assurance, or judgment. Furthermore, Reiss (2007) shared that coaching builds capacity to guide change in organizations through a supportive environment. Mentors reported the need to intertwine *coaching* techniques in critical conversations as mentees exhibited readiness for deeper thinking around problem-solving strategies. Mentors shared at their most recent meeting, February 2013, that their mentoring efforts took precedence in the beginning months of the first year, as mentee needs dictated *how-to* advice related to survival topics in daily practice. Several mentors reported that first year superintendents realized the multifaceted aspect of the position during these first few months as a real *eye-opener*. A former state superintendent association president and Kansas Superintendent of the Year stated:

"Superintendents are expected to know everything about the districts they lead, yet nowhere do they receive that type of training. KELI offers an opportunity to provide superintendents with a professionally trained mentor as well as professional development opportunities specifically designed for each person's/district's needs." (Mathes, personal communication, March 1, 2013).

The KELI mentoring and induction program anticipated and captured the need for mentoring and coaching mentees in its plan as most first year superintendents do not always realize the systemic impact of their decisions as well as the political intricacy of their new role.

Additional resources were provided to mentors to refine their coaching skills. *Leadership coaching for educators: Bringing out the best in school administrators* by Reiss (2007) provided discussion around coaching techniques in the school setting. In year two, *Opening the door to coaching conversations* by Cheliotis & Reilly (2012) provided the context for study. An intentional focus on acquisition of coaching skills through varied resources remained an important emphasis in the training program requested by and provided to KELI mentors.

### Reflection.

Mentees offered reflections regarding their own personal and professional growth during the year. To build knowledge of key state organizations and functions, mentee requirements incorporated attendance at one state board of education meeting and one state superintendent organization meeting. Written reflections, submitted by mentees after these meetings in Year 2, provided important evidence and record of their first year learning experiences.

One of the most revealing reflections occurred in the end of the year general leadership reflection. Mentees provided clear evidence of professional growth in their first year as a Kansas superintendent. One new leader shared, "All of our energy, our passion, is utilized to drive what our vision of the district should be...the true enjoyment in climbing the mountain isn't necessarily the climb, it is the reflection on just how far we have come." Documented responses from new leaders specifically targeted the new superintendent's ability to impact student learning and to move the district's vision forward. Waters & Marzano (2006) identified the establishment of articulated district goals that supports a clear vision for quality instruction as vital to the focused leadership provided by the superintendent.

### Survey.

Ruder (2012) administered a perception survey to all KELI mentees and mentors in the spring semester 2012 to gain insight into participant perceptions on the effectiveness of KELI's mentoring and induction program. Mentees and mentors in Cohort 1 (2011-2012), received surveys comprised of a Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The mentee survey contained 11 questions and the mentor survey had 16 questions. All nine mentors responded to the survey, as did all 26 mentees. The viewpoints offered by these respective groups affirmed the positive support provided by KELI's mentoring and induction program. Overall responses indicated the program was successful in helping new superintendents grow professionally.

Mentees reported high satisfaction with on-site mentoring from experienced and trained superintendents and expressed an appreciation for the helpful relationships they had formed with individual mentors. One mentee commented, "Sometimes we are assigned mentors who just go through the

Table 2 | **Mentee Perceptions: Face-to-Face Mentoring and Professional Growth**

Question	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Total
	n	n	n
The frequency of face-to-face mentor interaction met my needs.	21 (80.8%)	5 (19.2%)	26 (100%)
The KELI mentoring program helped me grow professionally.	20 (76.9%)	6 (23.1%)	26 (100%)



motions; not the case with my [KELI] mentor and I feel this to be an emphasis of the leadership the mentors they themselves are provided" (Ruder, 2012). Mentees also reported strong agreement that the KELI mentoring/induction program assisted their professional growth (see Table 2, p. 30).

Likewise, mentors confirmed the value of face-to-face contact as being both productive and impactful to the beginning superintendent. Fully 100% of mentors agreed that KELI developed professional growth and leadership capacity in mentees (see Table 3, p. 31). One mentor remarked, "I think all of the components have been very helpful – being onsite once a month, receiving monthly checklist information, professional development sessions, cohort networking, and onsite observations – was really well-thought out and worked well for its first year" (Ruder, 2012).

#### Program Feedback.

The efforts and success of KELI's operations were reviewed after the first year of programming offered to superintendents. The executive director provided an opportunity for mentors to offer feedback around the mentor's scope of work, mentoring and induction program requirements, mentoring procedures, and training support. At the conclusion of Year 1, mentors held meaningful discussion to identify what worked, what did not work, and to recommend changes.

Kansas mentors provided feedback around mentoring and coaching as an integral part of the process. This feedback was gathered in an informal narrative response format. Mentors stated coaching techniques including active listening, positive intent, clarifying questions, paraphrasing, and reflective feedback as effective in their mentee/mentor conversations. Mentors reported a strong emphasis on encouraging mentees to form their own solutions to local issues; thus continuing KELI's focus on building capacity for strong leadership. Coaching practices equipped mentors with skills to more fully realize this goal through the use of questioning techniques that encouraged deeper discussion and reflection. When asked what they would change in their coaching practices, mentors indicated they would clarify the purpose of face-to-face meetings, monitor progress towards goals and action plans more consistently, and continue to ask questions to prompt deeper thinking.

Mentors discussed common issues pertinent to mentee success. Recurring themes deserving priority discussion included transition or redefinition of role to the district chief executive officer, combination assignments as superintendent/principal, community awareness, national and state reform, personnel issues, and time management. Moreover, specialized high need content for beginning superintendents involved budget planning, working with boards of education, and the goal-setting and evaluation process. The impact, or ripple effect, of key decisions made by the superintendent was an essential topic reinforced by mentors. Mentors continued to recognize the need to differentiate support based on variables (district size, previous level of experience in or out of the current district assignment, etc.), as well as a need to respect the demanding schedule of the new superintendent. Mentors reflected on the mentoring strategies they would elect to use again in their interaction with mentees. Mentors consistently reinforced that face-to-face meetings and monthly checklists were valuable and well received.

In communication with mentors and through KELI activities, mentees described benefiting from several key components of the mentoring and induction program. These components included processing with veteran professionals, passionate about the superintendent's role, in face-to-face sessions. Mentees noted the value of these sessions and confirmed that face-to-face meetings were an excellent venue for providing support and encouragement. Evidenced by KELI's purposeful planning, the executive director remarked, "The vision of KELI was to create a program that went beyond theory or sharing war stories, but provided true on-going professional support" (Devin, personal communication, March 1, 2013). Thus, the experienced mentor served as a direct link in guiding the new superintendent through the needs and challenges faced when fielding the first year.

#### **Professional Organization Meetings and Networking**

Knight (2011) revealed the importance of reflective practice and authentic dialogue as an integral part of professional learning. In the KELI program, mentees are encouraged to reflect and think critically rather than look for automatic solutions from the mentor. Knight (2011) validated this approach

**Table 3 | Mentor Perceptions: Face-to-Face Mentoring and Professional Growth**

Question	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Total
	n	n	n
The frequency of face-to-face mentor interaction met the mentee's needs.	7 (77.8%)	2 (22.2%)	9 (100%)
The KELI mentoring program helped mentees grow professionally.	9 (100%)	0 (0%)	9 (100%)

to professional learning as a method to deepen the value and acquisition of important skills. Through guidance in program requirements, KELI further promoted mentee growth by participation in professional organization meetings and networking activities. Mentees attended at least four sessions from a list of approved activities that included attendance at professional organization meetings, KELI cohort group sessions, and executive leadership learning seminars as a part of the mentoring/induction program.

Through active participation in professional meetings and networking opportunities, mentoring/induction programs encourage new leaders to look ahead and actively deliberate the use of ideas or future planning needs (Knight, 2011). Documented mentee presence at professional organization meetings, (i.e., new superintendent's workshop, school board association or administrator conference, regional education summit) evidenced completion of this requirement for all Cohort 1 mentees.

The fall and spring cohort sessions provided KELI mentees with opportunities to meet, connect, and learn from other mentees and mentors. Mentees shared experiences relative to first year challenges and collaborated with other professionals in these meaningful sessions. In Year 2, content changes to cohort meetings provided a more responsive approach to practical issues faced by superintendents and exposure to crucial mid-year topics (i.e., budget, reports, and local board issues). Smaller group cohort sessions conducted in Year 2 also provided more intimate discussion and opportunity for collegial support. At the spring 2013 cohort meeting one mentee commented, "Most important were the actual experiences related to the processes described." At this latest cohort session, mentees received practical examples of strategic plans and goal-setting, board self-evaluation and superintendent performance-based evaluation documents, tips and timelines for board organization and upcoming tasks, and budget-based advice from four practicing Kansas superintendents. An additional mentee offered, "I enjoyed hearing from experienced superintendents." Open discussion at these sessions focused on topics of concern, general updates and questions, and supplementary resources mentees found helpful.

Cohort 1 mentees completing KELI program requirements attended professional leadership learning seminars. Evidence of attendance at these deep learning opportunities included a professional learning activity agreed upon by the mentee/mentor or attendance at a KELI-hosted seminar for district leaders. Professional growth derived from meaningful topics for today's educational leader and expanding networks for professional relationships continued to be a central goal achieved through mentee participation in these activities.

### Professional Learning for New and Veteran Leaders

The professional development component of the KELI program provided a means for deep learning opportunities for all Kansas leaders. KELI *Let's Talk* Sessions exemplified the Institute's central mission to provide professional development for all leaders in Kansas. These seminars were open to beginning and veteran school leaders, board members, and other local team members. Content experts opened each

seminar with a topic overview and research-based information. District superintendents or other school leaders then showcased current district practices on selected topics. These seminars provided audience members with a realistic vision of current local practice in action, a focus on the response of the leader, and leadership decisions relative to the topic. The last segment of the seminar devoted time to district team planning and application to local district context. The workshop format often included informal networking or interest-based groups for added discussion and collaboration. Comments from seminar participants on evaluation sheets included:

"The format and presenters were excellent!"

"This is the best learning activity I have been a part of in a long time;" and

"Today was powerful for me and my district."

The first *Let's Talk* seminar hosted by KELI offered in February 2012 addressed legal issues in schools. School law experts addressed daily operational and policy issues identified by current superintendents in the field. A superintendent panel then discussed local ramifications of pending decisions, policies, and local district impact. Evaluation comments noted the value of combining attorney and practicing superintendent perspectives on these common school-based issues.

The second KELI *Let's Talk* seminar held in April 2012 focused on the implications of technology initiatives in the school district setting. A university content expert presented an overview of effective technology use in schools. Four tech-savvy superintendents representing various sized districts in Kansas shared their experiences with technology implementation in the areas of policy, funding, training, and virtual learning environments. Seminar participants noted seminar strengths in the areas of networking, presenter knowledge, and the variety of technology topics.

The third and final *Let's Talk* learning opportunity in May 2012 hosted a strategic seminar emphasizing the leader's role in implementation of the national Common Core standards movement (CCSSO, 2012). The effective staff development model provided expert content delivery followed by presentations from leading-edge districts of varying size. A final break-out opportunity for participants allowed staff members to discuss their next steps in implementation of curricular standards. This seminar provided needed resources related to Common Core standards. Participants noted seminar strengths as hearing from small and large-sized districts, and providing local practitioners with many ideas and valuable networking connections.

During the spring 2012 semester, over 100 building and district leaders, including KELI mentees and mentors, attended 12.5 hours of professional learning offered through KELI (Thompson, 2012). In addition, attendees rated the KELI *Let's Talk* seminars above average to excellent on quality and content in session evaluations (see Table 4, p. 33). The engaging and reflective format of KELI's *Let's Talk* seminars provided a means for professional growth and focused conversation for Kansas leaders tackling current day issues and 21st century challenges.

Table 4 | Participant Evaluation of *Let's Talk Professional Learning Seminars*

Question	Legal Advisors	Social Media	Common Core
	Scale: 5 - Excellent; 3 - Average; 1 - Poor		
The seminar provided opportunities for me to deepen my understanding of the program topic.	4.6	4.5	4.5
The presenters appropriately addressed the seminar topics	4.8	3.7	4.5
The format for the seminar enhanced the learning experience for me and created opportunities to share my ideas and experiences with others.	4.5	4.05	4.5
The overall quality and content of this seminar met my expectations.	4.5	4.4	4.4

### Responding to Year 2

In KELI's second year of operation (2012-2013) its promising practices of mentoring and induction service and professional learning activities centered on leadership moved forward with meaningful changes; reaching 22 first-year Kansas superintendents. All 22 mentees in Cohort 2 are due to complete requirements to move to full licensure or to earn credits towards renewal of their license. Mentor logs will provide documentation of the total number of individualized mentoring service provided to cohort two mentees. Kansas districts will again be eligible for reimbursement of the \$500 participation fee as new superintendents complete KELI program requirements in May.

An additional tier of service provided by KELI in 2012-2013 involved Cohort 1 superintendents transitioning to their second year in the role. Alsbury and Hackmann (2006) reported mentoring programs hold promise for promoting successful integration of new leaders in their local settings as a relatively new approach for quality professional growth for school leaders. Building on the continuation of service to address the needs of executive leaders, KELI invited superintendents completing first year program requirements to participate in a second year of mentoring in a tiered system of support aimed at deeper integration into the superintendent's role. This less intensive program involved access to mentors and professional development. In this model, KELI mentors reached out to mentees formally once each quarter and continued to be available for support when needed. In most cases, the original mentor was assigned to continue work with the mentee during Year 2. During the second year of support, mentors focused on assisting mentees to research and utilize resources to move towards successful and contextualized solutions. The seven superintendents that elected to formally participate in the second year received updated monthly checklists of activities important in the current calendar year and attended KELI cohort sessions and other professional learning activities at a reduced rate.

KELI professional learning events scheduled for spring 2013 encompassed partner collaboration with state agency experts as a result of significant alterations underway in state education related procedures. District leaders set to embrace sweeping changes in key state department initiatives attended informational and participatory *What's New* sessions on accreditation, accountability, and federal legislative waiver impact. Two state department directors delivered insightful and timely information from pilot projects conducted in Kansas school districts. These pilot projects were used to gather feedback and inform the next steps in accreditation and accountability requirements. Presentations reflected feedback on these *What's New* requirements and upcoming changes to existing models. The format of these learning events mirrored the organization of 2011-2012 KELI *Let's Talk* seminars by providing expert presentation on content, examples of districts at the forefront of implementation, and time for local district team discussion. Local Kansas districts, representing a variety of size and demographics, and recommended for progressive innovation in the topic area, provided meaningful application of the content for attending district teams.

Finally, Kansas superintendent mentors explored coaching skills at a deeper level in Year 2. Coaching training in fall 2012 provided by certified instructors focused on mentor reflection around defining coach/mentor roles and skills most useful to the coaching mindset. In this customized training, mentors practiced coaching skills through role-playing and reflective feedback in coaching labs to review and refine essential coaching practices. KELI staff developed and introduced coaching tools for mentors in response to their request for helpful tips in guiding coaching practices and sustaining changes in habits. For instance, a coaching tips sheet showcased key prompts for reinforcing helpful questions and useful techniques at-a-glance. Other tools included a collaborative summary sheet to document mentee/mentor interactions and monthly timeline/protocols to track and plan for important



topics and discussion during the calendar year. In collaboration with their mentors, mentees reflected regularly on their professional growth toward Interstate School Leadership License Consortium (ISLLC) leadership standards in October, January, and May. A formative self-assessment also provided mentors an opportunity to reflect on their individual progress and improvement targets. Continued efforts by mentees and mentors to strengthen KELI's connection to leadership standards and reflective practice, served to deepen the program's impact and value. In addition, mentors provided a critical point of feedback involving the continuation of coaching training for new mentors transitioning into the KELI program as well as continued training to reinforce skills for current mentors.

#### Modifications in Program Procedures.

Results of the survey and feedback from mentors and mentees led to some changes in the program's second year. A critical role of mentors involved decisive feedback and informed reflection to guide KELI program planning for mentoring/induction and professional learning. These mentors' voices provided insight for program review and evaluation. KELI mentors served as a conduit of communication in advising, reflecting, and networking as a collective group during regularly scheduled meetings. Meeting content included general updates on KELI steering committee and advisory council discussion, advisement and clarification on business items and procedures, and program completion requirements. Mentors held open discussion on progress and delivery of services during meetings. Meeting summaries further recorded an important and historical blueprint of the initial operational guidelines of KELI's mentoring and induction program and captured the critical feedback offered through mentor advisement.

Mentors recommended selected operational adjustments in the mentor scope of work and mentor logs due to improvements in current practice. In addition, mentors suggested a few modifications to mentoring and induction program requirements related to changes in practice in the field. One such change expanded the required reflections for mentees by adding more structure to the reflection process for experiences during the year, in addition to the original requirement for an end of the year general reflection on leadership aspects learned in year one.

Practical issues also dictated change. The number of new superintendents and the geographic location of their districts allowed KELI to avoid using currently practicing superintendents in Kansas as mentors, as had been recommended in the original program design. Differing geographic locations between mentees and mentors continued to present challenges as did responding to new superintendent appointments late in the summer. Other changes centered on procedural aspects such as scheduling, documentation of mentee licenses, program completion verification, regulatory compliance review, as well as training needs to support coaching practices.

In 2012-2013, enhancements implemented by mentors and KELI staff provided additional support and improved focus. Mentors conducted a trial monthly phone call in an attempt to embed and strengthen coaching practices in the mentoring

process. New services included an article of the month for KELI mentees and mentors along with a process to request research on current topics. Mentors utilized various technology-based tools (i.e., blogs) on a limited basis to enhance informal communication. Operational growth occurred by increasing support staff assigned to KELI through an additional university faculty member and a full-time administrative assistant in fall 2012 by committed resources from the university's College of Education. These practices continued value-added support for all KELI participants.

#### **Plan for Long-Term Program Accountability and Evaluation**

The development of a long-term evaluation design for KELI is underway. Providing local and state accountability and informing national trends will necessitate a comprehensive plan. The design will ultimately answer the question, "What is the impact of KELI on new superintendents and professional learning for new and veteran leaders in Kansas?" The research base outlined factors important to a state-wide emphasis on leadership development for superintendent mentoring and professional growth (Fullan, 2008; Miller, T., Devin, M., Shoop, R. (2005); NASBE, 2009; Wallace Foundation, n.d.). The state department of education and field practitioners in Kansas had identified the critical need for a model to support the complex and dynamic transition of first year superintendents as well as a quality process to acquire a Kansas professional leadership licensure. These efforts appeared through state-wide coordination and key discussion set to bridge theory and practice.

Document analysis and stakeholder interviews informed the accountability and evaluation design. Key themes reflected initial program strengths, current challenges, and informed initial findings of expected outcomes around KELI's impact on new superintendents. Preliminary evaluation research questions established guidance for assessing long-term desired outcomes that related to program goals. Data from multiple sources will serve to inform and develop a suite of instruments for ongoing evaluation using a time-series design for cohort groups. These instruments (i.e., self-assessment, observation, and survey tools) will be developed to measure progress on expected outcomes and relate outcomes to program components such as mentoring/induction, professional learning, cohort trends, and overall impact. Planned evaluation will address both formative and summative issues. Collected data will be analyzed to inform meaningful program modifications and future design of service and support for new leaders. Enhancing program effectiveness and delivery of service to field practitioners through a comprehensive and informed accountability and evaluation process will provide the application and context to further define leadership needs in Kansas. Future program evaluation strands could include KELI's impact on superintendent performance, role satisfaction, retention, student achievement, leadership preparation, community context, board relations, and organizational change.

#### **Future Direction**


An organization's capacity to grow in relevancy and strength is upheld by purposeful identification of current

practitioner needs and transference of critical support in policy and resources to embrace those needs (Orr, King, & LaPointe, 2010). A logical step in KELI's five-year plan expands leadership impact and support at all levels, to include new and veteran superintendents and principals. In response to this plan, a state-wide task force convened in 2012-2013 to examine the needs of a mentoring and induction program for first-year principals in Kansas. The task force membership is comprised of elementary, middle, and high school principals, superintendents, and representation from other Kansas professional organizations. This task force delved into research and best practice (Wallace Foundation, 2012), examined current programs at local and state levels, and surveyed superintendents and principals in Kansas for essential input into current needs and priorities. Data from this process culminated in a reflective and informed discussion by task force members. The KELI Building Leader Mentoring and Induction Task Force is charged with submitting a recommendation to KELI's executive director, spring 2013.

Widening knowledge and visibility of KELI's mentoring and induction program through local, state, and national presentations and publications will cultivate its promising practices and emergent impact on Kansas leaders and others abroad. Concerted partner efforts to expand field awareness and knowledge of KELI services through superintendent searches is a strong example of partner impact and widens KELI's value to Kansas school district leadership. The KELI partners convened in October 2012 and affirmed the original intent of the founding partnerships and KELI's mission. One of the original six partners who was a state resource focusing on development of civic leadership, chose to withdraw from participation as a partner due to time commitments, but continues to support KELI's mission and programs. The commitment and respect of collaboration and partner resources remains essential to KELI's expansion and service. Anticipated and natural involvement of organizations, such as the state association for secondary school principals and state association of elementary school principals will spread professional outreach to building principals as well as district administrators.

Multi-year program and fee structures inclusive of superintendent and principal leadership support are under consideration by KELI's governance structure. KELI's horizon is limitless as numerous types of leadership roles render growing need, definition, and increase capacity for sustainability in future programming. Dedicated resources and committed partnerships remain central to the institute's propensity to build and flourish. This steadfast direction will enable KELI to pursue purposeful growth, maintain a focused lens on identified needs, and an ability to embrace meaningful priorities. At the heart of KELI's work is a responsive approach to an educational landscape that is rapidly changing. Underlining KELI's unique endorsement as an area professional learning center further contributes to its mission to serve and assist Kansas school leaders with a strong, growth-oriented course for license renewal, as well as augment the positive impact of leadership development in Kansas schools.

The contributions of external partner resources, the university's division of continuing education, and college of

education and department assurances have provided a viable source of initial support to further define and accomplish the mission of KELI. KELI's future is further strengthened by a major university-wide initiative in the 2025 College of Education's strategic action plan. The chair of the Department of Educational Leadership, in a year-end KELI report (2012) stated, "There is no model for what KELI started out to do, and KELI – through partnership – has created a highly successful blueprint for leadership development that has significant national implications" (p. 2). As cited by Scott (2011), KELI's opening ceremony keynote speaker and international consultant commented, "KELI provides the roadmap for Kansas to lead the nation in leadership training both in developing new school leaders and in supporting experienced executive leaders" (p. 13). This vision is coming true. 

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